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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#) [JO](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR KING ABDULLAH'S VISIT TO THE U.S.

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: King Abdullah is extremely pleased to be the first Arab leader to meet with the President in Washington. He wants to show his skeptical public and the wider Arab street that his moderate approach gains him access to (and, he hopes, influence with) the White House. The visit also enhances his standing among his fractious peers. Jordanians question, however, whether the necessary pressure will be exerted on Israel to bring about a two-state solution. The King has high expectations that he will come home with tangible evidence.

12. (S/NF) The King may offer Jordan as a conduit for what he sees as a possible U.S. approach to Hamas. He will call for greater consultation with Arab moderates before serious U.S. engagement with Iran and Syria. The King is likely to express deep anxiety about Israel's perceived indifference to Jordanian equities in Jerusalem's holy sites, which he believes undermines his legitimacy and could be destabilizing. He may ask for supplemental U.S. economic and military assistance. End Summary.

Jordan and the Two State Solution

13. (S/NF) The Palestinian plight has special resonance for the King because some 60 percent of Jordan's population has roots in the West Bank or Gaza, including his wife, Rania. That very population is also seen as a threat to the future of the Hashemite Kingdom. Jordan has consistently rejected the proposal of an "alternative" Palestinian homeland in Jordan and called for Palestinian self-determination as part of a two-state solution. Ongoing Jordanian anxiety about the "alternative homeland" has been heightened by intra-Palestinian disarray and by perceived support among influential Israelis and even some former U.S. officials for a "three state solution" in which Gaza would be placed under Egyptian control and in which parts of the West Bank would be supervised by Jordan.

High Arab Expectations for Peace

14. (S/NF) The King enthusiastically favors the Arab Peace Initiative (API), broadened to a "57-State Solution" in which all the Arab and Muslim States embrace Israel in exchange for a withdrawal to the 1967 borders. But he has lost patience for a "process" that does not bear fruit, believing continued Palestinian dispossession undermines Arab countries at peace with or open to peace with Israel, while extremists (i.e.,

Iran, Hizballah, and Hamas) gloat and grow fat. The King will be keen to learn about the U.S. strategy for Palestinian statehood.

¶5. (S/NF) On April 11, Jordanian, Saudi, Lebanese, Egyptian, Qatari, and Palestinian Ministers, plus the Arab League Secretary General, met in Amman in advance of the King's trip. The Syrian FM, who was in Iran, phoned in his support for the API. The King will come bearing points (to be reported septel), which were the consensus result of that "7 1" gathering:

-Israel must unconditionally freeze settlements and curb "natural growth" or the Arabs will not engage on peace.

-President Obama should personally push for comprehensive peace and present that goal as integral to U.S. national interests.

-The U.S. must eschew open-ended talks and present benchmarks, end parameters, and firm deadlines to the parties, who must be held accountable.

-A Camp David-style summit overseen by the President may be necessary to jumpstart negotiations.

-The Arabs will reward Israel with unspecified "deliverables" in exchange for Israel's taking interim steps such as freezing settlements and dismantling outposts.

-If there were real progress toward peace, the Arabs could collectively face Iran and help the U.S. on issues ranging from Iraq, to Sudan, to Yemen.

Hamas: Jordan As a Conduit?

¶6. (S/NF) Jordan began a roughly six-month "flirtation" with Hamas in the second half of 2008 and defended those publicly popular GID-led talks by pointing out that Jordan could not afford to stand on the sidelines as Israel and Egypt engaged Hamas and Syria and Iran were even more active. The dialogue is now on hold, but rapprochement between the U.S. and its regional adversaries may make reengagement with Hamas appealing. Senior Jordanian officials have suggested Jordan as a back channel to Hamas if the U.S. wanted a conduit.

Iran and Syria Engagement

¶7. (S/NF) Jordanian officials doubt Iran will agree to limit its regional ambitions and instead argue for depriving it of issues that make it a hero to the Arab street by reaching a "two-state solution" and resolving other Arab-Israeli disputes. The King has noted that Arabs worry about a nuclear Iran as do Israelis but that a strike on Iran before progress toward peace would compel the Arabs to support Iran. Jordanian officials have fretted that the U.S. could permit Iran to play a hegemonic role in Iraq and the region in exchange for giving up its nuclear program. The King fears U.S.-Iran engagement would deepen intra-Arab schisms and lead some countries to defect to the Iranian camp. The GOJ proposes that the U.S. publicly make clear that the Arabs are full parties in any Iran policy review.

¶8. (S/NF) Jordanians are also skeptical that Syria is ready to change. The GOJ believes Damascus must be made to see that the U.S. was not "running toward it" but was rather giving Syria a chance to return to the Arab moderate fold and to reap the benefits. In that vein, Jordan has made its own overtures to Syria, recently hosting President Bashar Al-Asad for his first visit in five years. The Jordanians believe Syria may be content to prolong talks with the U.S. for as long as possible rather than offering any concessions up front. (Comment: On both Iran and Syria, the GOJ wants the U.S. to demand early deliverables to prevent them from dragging on talks fruitlessly. Particularly with Iran, the Jordanians may hope that setting benchmarks will keep talks

limited and short-lived. End Comment.)

Mughrabi Gate: A Ticking Bomb

¶9. (S/NF) The King is deeply concerned by Israel's perceived indifference to Jordanian equities regarding Jerusalem's holy sites, particularly in the case of Israeli plans to rebuild the Mughrabi Gate ascent to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif.

Jordan believes that the Hashemites, as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, have custodianship of Muslim holy sites - and that Israel acknowledged that in the 1994 peace treaty. This role is taken on behalf of the entire Muslim community, and thus the King and his advisors believe his legitimacy would be undermined at home and abroad were he to acquiesce to Israeli plans. Jordan wants to design, build and pay for the new ramp and insists it will not let concern for its relations with Israel prevent taking "every legal measure" to block Israeli "unilateralism" in an area seen as Islamic territory. Post repeatedly has urged Jordan to take this up with Israel with the same urgency that they raise it with us, but the GOJ has continued to push for the U.S. to intervene on its behalf. Mughrabi Gate has become a competition of sovereign claims, with Israel firmly holding the possession card over Jerusalem, possibly complicating simple technical or diplomatic solutions if Jordan truly considers this a "redline." The King has warned he does not want Israel and the U.S. "to be surprised when it blows up in their faces."

Iraq: Better, But Worries Remain

¶10. (S/NF) Six years after the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the King and his advisors seem more optimistic about Iraq. Jordan has embraced PM Nuri Al-Maliki, and the King last August became the first Arab leader to visit Iraq since OIF. He has since dispatched ministerial visitors to Baghdad and Prime Minister Nader Dahabi is expected to travel there soon. Jordan's leaders fear that Iran could recoup influence as the U.S. troop presence dwindles and that violent sectarianism could return. They urge us to assure that we do not leave before Iraqi political and security institutions are strong and independent enough to resist Iranian influence.

Bilateral Issues

¶11. (SBU) Economic and Military Assistance: In 2009, Jordan is receiving \$365 million in U.S. economic assistance and \$335 million in military aid, and has requested an additional \$300 million economic supplemental and a \$200 million military assistance supplemental. The global economic crisis has significantly impacted economic growth and investment levels here, making Jordan increasingly reliant on supplemental appropriations for both Economic Support Funds (ESF) and as a proportion of its military budget. (Note: The U.S. and Jordan in September 2008 signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding on Foreign Assistance for 2010-2014 that supports the U.S. providing Jordan \$360 million per year in ESF and \$300 million per year in Foreign Military Financing. End Note.)

¶12. (S) JAF officials have said that the budget shortfall threatens Jordan's participation in regional military support missions and has asked the U.S. to press Gulf States for financial assistance. Jordan has committed to a number of such missions, including - for Afghanistan - a Special Operations Force group for combat missions, an infantry battalion for election security, military police, and combat engineers. On Iraq, Jordan has agreed to facilitate redeployment of U.S. forces and equipment. For Lebanon, Jordan has agreed to upgrade and provide 10 M60A1 tanks with funding from UAE, and another 56 if funding is found. For Yemen, Jordan has agreed to provide 25 M113 Armored Personnel Carriers pending third-party funding.

¶13. (C) Reform: The King may claim that the economic crisis is retarding political and economic reform, but reform had

slowed in recent years given domestic opposition to the King's largely progressive vision and global economic challenges. We continue to urge broad-based economic, tax, and regulatory reforms to reduce debt, tackle unemployment, increase export competitiveness, protect intellectual property and labor rights, and better manage water and energy resources. While the King promotes democratization indirectly, he has proved reluctant to spend political capital on pressing directly for reforms which could encroach on his power base of conservative tribal elites. We continue to push for changes to Jordan's electoral system, increased political space for civil society and the press, and the promotion of women's rights.

¶14. (S) Nuclear Energy: Resource-poor Jordan imports over 95 percent of its energy, and the King has placed a priority on developing a civilian nuclear energy program. The GOJ is anxious to sign a Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA) with the United States, required for U.S. companies to provide nuclear reactors, fuel or materials. NCA negotiations have stalled, however, since the Chairman of the Jordan Atomic Energy Commission indicated in March that the GOJ did not accept U.S.-proposed changes to the NCA agreed in February ¶2008. The King's visit is an opportunity for the U.S. to further engage Jordan's leadership and obtain agreement on any final changes to the NCA needed to close the deal. Meanwhile, the GOJ has moved forward with its nuclear energy program by signing NCAs with Canada, China, France, and South Korea as well as MOUs with Canada, France, South Korea, Russian, Romania, the UK, and the United States.

Comment: Symbolism and Substance

¶15. (S/NF) Aside from the symbolic and political value of being among the very first foreign leaders to meet face-to-face with the President, the King increasingly fears that time is neither on his side nor that of his fellow moderates on issues ranging from Palestine, to Iran's hegemonic ambitions, to Arab disunity. He will arrive in Washington not only representing Jordanian perspectives, but burdened with the knowledge that his peers are scrutinizing him from afar and expect him to represent their collective ambitions. The King's advisors fervently hope that the King can return with something concrete. They note that so tainted is the term "moderate" that they prefer he not be referred to as such during his visit. End Comment.

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